

As Far North as They Come (Part 1)

[Intro]

Sweden is a country more famed for its monster pike than big carp. With a population of only 10.4 million people and over 22,000 lakes, there's a lot of water to go round, many of them unfished.

Carp aren't as widespread in Sweden compared to the rest of Europe. Still considered an invasive species, they've made their way into the waterways mostly through illegal stockings.

The harsh winters and large predator populations make it difficult for carp to reproduce naturally in the waters here. The lucky fry that survive the freezing temperatures and relentless predators find themselves in an utterly brutal environment.

The difficulties associated with being a carp in Sweden mean that most lakes are relatively low-stocked. Fishing waters of over 100 acres that hold fewer than 50 carp is commonplace here. Combine that with extreme weather, inaccessible banks, and more snags than you can shake a stick at, you've got a recipe that only the most determined of anglers will follow.

So, what are the rewards for a carp angler in Sweden?

Those determined enough to take on this wild country may be rewarded with a glimpse of raw, untouched beauty. Wild, dark scaly mirrors lay in wait for the carp angler who seeks true adventure. Although most waters are low-stocked, the stamp of fish is good. Only the strong survive through such harsh conditions and if you're lucky enough to hook one, it's likely to be large, powerful and full of character.

Discovering Carp in Sweden

I've lived in Sweden for almost five years now. Originally from the UK, fishing has long been a passion of mine. I spent my youth rolling meat down the Upper Lea for chub and barbel before moving on to target carp in the many lakes surrounding my home in Hertfordshire.

Throughout my early 20s, I swayed in and out of fishing as many of us have. I've sold setups as quickly as I've bought them, but the bug never truly goes away. By the time I moved to Sweden, I had accumulated quite a lot of tackle and as much as I didn't want to let go, I had to sell it once and for all before jumping on a one-way flight to Sweden.

I assumed that carp simply didn't exist here, after all this is the land of fly and lure fishing...

Almost two years passed before I wet a line in Sweden. I dabbled in a bit of lure fishing for pike and perch to pass the time but the memories of carp fishing back in the UK played on my mind. I longed to escape the clutches of my small city apartment and wanted to be on the bank in search of carp once again.

My passion for carp was reignited when I started chatting to an angling friend from back in England. He'd just started fishing a new water and was doing well. We'd speak on the phone weekly and he'd update me on his campaign. We got talking about potential carp in Sweden and after watching a known angler's film on his adventures here, we both started questioning whether any carp resided in the waters around me.

I searched the internet frantically trying to find information, with little to no avail until I stumbled across an old Swedish article about a park lake not far from me. The article featured a picture of the most ridiculous-looking mirror covered in scales and painted with dark shades of red.

Surely this was too good to be true...

The Park Lake

Excited by my discovery, I immediately jumped in the car and drove to the lake. I parked up and began walking. Was this it? If so, does this place still hold any carp?

I was blown away when I reached the water. This "park lake" is surrounded by pine forest. The only urban thing about it is a small residential area and a gravel track beside one end of the 20-acre lake, the rest feels wild.

I walked the lake for hours with a pocket full of dog mixers and half a loaf of bread, hoping to tempt something up from the murky depths. It was a warm day in mid-July and the water was flat-calm, perfect for spotting fish.

As I approached the west side of the lake, I noticed something larger than the roach and rudd I'd been seeing break the surface. I sat and watched the area from the elevation of a tree stump that had succumbed to the wrath of a beaver. A short while later, the unmistakable dorsal of a carp broke the surface. I watched as a common of around 20 lb cruised the upper layers basking in the summer sun.

It's hard to describe the feeling I had while watching that carp. I had butterflies in my stomach and a child-like sense of wonder I hadn't experienced since my early days of angling.

It didn't take long for more to appear. I saw five fish that day, one common and four ancient-looking scaly mirrors. I dragged myself away from the lake that evening and on the drive home I set it in my head that I'd order a setup and get fishing as soon as possible.

The Difficulties of Living This Far North

When I arrived home after that unforgettable day I went straight online in search of tackle. This is when I realised how rare carp anglers are in Sweden. I scrolled through countless websites searching for familiar carp fishing brands, finding nothing but predator tackle.

In the end, I resorted to the old faithful English tackle shop and ordered through Angling Direct. I purchased a simple setup that would be enough to get me out fishing nights again. Then I got the delivery estimate... Three to four weeks! I guess that's one of the downsides of living this far north.

While eagerly waiting for my kit to arrive, I visited the park lake at least a few times per week. I started to see more and more carp, including a few that dwarfed the others I'd seen. I also began meeting anglers on the lake. 90% of the time, I'd arrive to find no one fishing, but now and then I'd turn up to find a bivvy nestled in the blueberry bushes.

During this period, I met several people who would later become good friends. I also gained more information about the lake's history and its stock. No one really knew how many carp were in there but most assumed there were 30 to 40 still swimming.

The Hunger for More

Eventually, I received my setup and began fishing the park lake. I knew the fishing wasn't going to be easy. I'd met several good anglers by this point and heard stories of month-long blanks. The majority of the carp in the park lake are from an '80s stocking and although it's nothing compared to an English fishery, it had seen some pressure over the years.

Regardless, I powered on and fished. I guess you could say I had a run of beginner's luck that autumn, landing three nice carp over a few nights. However, I quickly got knocked back down to earth with a long and almost soul-destroying streak of blanks.

I remained determined and didn't let my failures cloud me. I fished hard but as I watched autumn begin to turn more wintery, it felt as though I was going stale on the lake. I needed to find another water, somewhere I could fish to take my eyes off the venue that had been beating me up.

I'd heard whispers of a "forbidden lake" close by. This one was another beast entirely, a massive wild water surrounded by forest and pasture. Apparently, it used to be fishable but the local council revoked the fishing rights because the land owners that bordered the water were sick of anglers leaving rubbish behind.

Regardless of the stories, I decided to go in search of the venue.

I found the lake on Google Maps but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't find access to the bank. Every road that led to the lake either had a private property sign or a set of gates. Eventually, I found a place to park the car to try and access one of the banks on foot.

After a 20-minute walk through the forest, getting lost a few times, I arrived at the water's edge. What lay before me was 120 acres of pure paradise without a single angler in sight. Crystal-clear waters, pine-laden banks, and the feeling of complete seclusion. I had to fish this place, but how?

Barrowing my kit down the route I'd just taken was not an option and the roads leading to the lake were private. As much as I desired to wet a line here, I had to put it on the back burner, for now at least.

A Chance Meeting

A chance meeting occurred that year. I met a Dutch angler fishing the park lake and we got talking. He's a dog handler who travels to Sweden a few times a year for work. When he's not searching the airports for suspicious packages, he's out searching the lakes for ancient carp.

Maarten is a keen angler and we clicked as soon as we met. I respected his determination and drive. The guy would turn up to the park lake after work at 11 in the night, fish until six in the morning and pack up to go to his next shift. His determination paid off though, he caught several of the park lake's gems by seizing the little time he had.

We began fishing together here and there when Maarten had time off work. It didn't take long to get on to the topic of the big wild lake I'd recently visited. To my surprise, he had been there too, and what's better, he'd fished it.

I asked him how he'd managed to gain access to the water, seen as most of the bordering land is private. He then told me a story that would signify the start of a whole new chapter for us both.

Maarten wandered down one of the private tracks and found a piece of land that bordered the lake. He sat by the water and watched for some time before inevitably an angry landowner turned up to shout at him. It was the farmer's wife, she insisted that he wasn't allowed to be there.

He talked with the woman, who eventually calmed down, and asked her if it was possible to fish from her land. She was adamant that her husband wouldn't allow it but with the offer of a bottle of scotch and a bouquet of flowers, the farmer and his wife came around and granted Maarten permission to fish.

The Long Winter

After discovering the wild water and finding my route in, the carp fishing season was basically over. The autumn leaves fell and the calm, still waters quickly froze over, locking the treasures within them under ice.

From late November through to early April, the lakes in this part of Sweden form enough ice to support the weight of a lorry. Unfortunately, when winter starts here, the carp fishing ends.

I spent the long winter dreaming of fishing the wild lake. I ventured down a few times during the colder months to get a look at the lake from the ice. Standing in the centre, I got a feel for how vast the place is.

I decided to start early after the thaw, arriving at the wild lake in April with the desperate need to escape into nature for a night. After paying the farmer his dues (a bottle of Jameson Whiskey), I got the rods out and set up my shelter atop a dusting of spring snow.

The temperature dropped below -10 degrees Celsius that night. It was the coldest and most optimistic overnighter I've ever done. As the moisture from my breath rose, I watched as it froze instantly on the inside of my brolly.

I awoke with nothing to show for my efforts other than a couple of bream and a crayfish that tethered itself to one of my rigs. I enjoyed the time out but decided it was best to wait a few more weeks for the temperatures to increase. I definitely didn't fancy doing too many more nights in those kinds of temperatures.

An Unforgettable Start

It wasn't until late May that I got the chance to head out on the bank again. Maarten was back in Sweden and we decided to make some time to fish the wild lake together. We planned a weekend social on the spot with a few beers, a BBQ, and the chance of a fish.

I arrived at the lake late on Friday, flicked a couple of rods out, set up the shelter and got some rest to wake up for sunrise.

The first night passed quickly but we awoke to a violent take on Maarten's left-hand rod just as the sun kissed the horizon. At this time of year, the light barely fades throughout the night so although it was only four in the morning, it felt like midday.

Maarten was on the rod quickly and jumped in the boat to get over the fish. Sadly, this one was lost to a snag before getting any real idea of how big it was. This is the harsh reality of fishing these wild untouched waters. Large jagged boulders, sharp mussel beds and sunken trees are the norm on this kind of venue.

Gutted, Maarten attached a fresh rig and boated out the rod once again before we both got under our shelters to seek refuge from the incoming rain.

At around 10 a.m. he had another chance. This time it was his right-hand rod. Maarten was quick to jump in the boat once again and fortunately, after an epic battle, there was a carp in the net. He towed it back to shore and we both looked in awe at the scaly creature that awaited weighing and photos.

Shortly after transferring the carp into a retention sling, the heavens opened and the rain came flooding in. We waited for a lull in the weather and then prepared to process the fish. It wasn't huge but we were off the mark. Who cares when they look like this anyway? It was scale-perfect, probably uncaught and we were both over the moon to get off the mark.

The Joys of Swedish Springtime

The rest of the day passed without much activity. The rain was relentless and didn't stop until late that evening. Determined for a social, we set up Maarten's spare brolly with a couple of chairs underneath it.

The day was spent laughing, joking and sharing stories about life both on and off the bank. We finished the day with a BBQ of pork and vegetables and then enjoyed a couple of beers while watching the football. The rain wasn't going to ruin our social!

We got into our sleep systems around 11 p.m. and got some rest in anticipation of another bite. I slept with one eye open that night.

First Blood

At 3 a.m. my right hand rod melted off. I was quick on the rod and managed to get the carp under control.

Somehow, I was able to play the carp to the bank without jumping in the boat. It took me under a couple of our other lines and then proceeded to make a long, heavy run in the open water in front of me. There are fewer snags in front of the swim and although I got the boat ready, I didn't need to use it.

After a quality battle, I had a carp in the net. Under the haze of the morning mist, I didn't quite realise what I had captured. I lifted the arms of the net and then it dawned on me. It was without a doubt a new PB. In fact, I'd never seen a carp this big in Sweden before.

I shouted to Maarten who was surprisingly still asleep in his bivvy. I'd managed to get the carp in without too much commotion and didn't bother waking him up for the fight. But now it was in the net, he had to see the proportions of this fish.

Every time I lifted the net this carp seemed to grow both in size and the number of scales along its flanks. This was a big and beautiful carp. We decided to retain it safely until the light conditions improved. Although it's relatively light at this time of the morning this one deserved some decent photos.

I stayed up for a while and had a brew, trying to let what just happened sink in.

When the sun rose higher above the horizon we prepped the mat and zeroed the scales. We lifted the carp from the water and carefully transported it to the mat. The scales swung round to a couple ounces over 38lb. An absolute monster of a Swedish carp and a moment I'll never forget.

I was on cloud nine for the rest of the day. The sun came out, so we fired up another BBQ and shared a good bottle of red to celebrate. When I hit the sack that evening, I marvelled at the photos of my capture, blissfully unaware that this was only the beginning of my adventure on this huge wild water...

Photo credits: [Maarten Stolk](#) & [Connor McElroy](#)